1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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Nuer have, it will be acknowledged, a low technology which, taken with their meagre food-supply and scanty trade, may be supposed to have some effect on their social relations and their character. Social ties are narrowed, as it were, and the people of village and camp are drawn closer together, in a moral sense, for they are in consequence highly interdependent and their activities tend to be joint undertakings. This is seen best in the dry season, when the cattle of many families are tethered in a common kraal and driven as a single herd to the grazing grounds and daily activities are co-ordinated into a common rhythm of life.

I risk being accused of speaking idly when I suggest that a very simple material culture narrows social ties in another way. Technology from one point of view is an oecological process: an adaptation of human behaviour to natural circumstances. From another point of view material culture may be regarded as part of social relations, for material objects are chains along which social relationships run, and the more simple is a material culture the more numerous are the relationships expressed through it. I give, without further explanation, a few examples. The simple family is attached to the hut, the household to the byre, the joint family to the hamlet, the village community to its ridge, and village communities are linked together by paths. Herds of cattle are nuclei around which kinship groups are clustered and the relationships between their members operate through cattle and are expressed in terms of cattle. A single small artifact may be a nexus between persons, e.g. a spear which passes from father to son by gift or inheritance is a symbol of their relationship and one of the bonds by which it is maintained. Thus people not only create their material culture and attach themselves to it, but also build up their relationships through it and see them in terms of it. As Nuer have very few kinds of material objects and very few specimens of each kind, their social value is increased by their having to serve as the media of many relationships and they are, in consequence, often invested with ritual functions. Moreover social relationships instead of being diffused along many chains of material links are narrowed by the meagreness of culture to a few simple foci of interest. This

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571 may be supposed to lead to a small range of relationship-forms with a high degree of solidarity in the smaller local and kinship groups and we may expect to find a simple social structure.

181 Some outstanding traits in Nuer character may be said to be consistent with their low technology and scanty food-supply. I again emphasize the crudity and discomfort of their lives. All who have lived with Nuer would, I believe, agree that though they are very poor in goods they are very proud in spirit. Schooled in hardship and hunger—for both they express contempt—they accept the direst calamities with resignation and endure them with courage. Content with few goods they despise all that lies outside them; their derisive pride amazes a stranger. Reliant on one another they are loyal and generous to their kinsmen. One might even to some extent attribute their pronounced individualism to resistance to the persistent claims of kinsmen and neighbours against which they have no protection but stubbornness. The qualities which have been mentioned, courage, generosity, patience, pride, loyalty, stubbornness, and independence, are the virtues the Nuer themselves extol, and these values can be shown to be very appropriate to their simple mode of life and to the simple set of social relations it engenders.

XI

571 463 It is unnecessary to write more on what are generally called economics. They can be further considered in an account of kinship and family life. I will only ask the reader to bear in mind the following matters. (1) One cannot treat Nuer economic relations by themselves, for they always form part of direct social relationships of a general kind. Thus, division of labour is part of general relationships between persons of different sexes and of different ages, between spouses, between parents and children, between kinsmen of one order or another, and so forth. (2) There is some specialization, but it is occasional, and there are no occupations which can be called professions. Some women make better pots, grindstones, and baskets than others; only smiths can make certain objects; there are only a few men who understand how to make and put on the arm the tight-fitting bracelets which young men wear to show their endurance, and so on; and people who want these things either ask for them in the name of kinship or give the maker of them some millet for his services, or make him a gift on some future occasion. The man who wants the object

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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571 463 and the maker of it always belong to the same local community and conduct the affair between themselves, there being no exchange of objects or services through the medium of a third person, and there is always between them a general social relationship of one kind or another, and their economic relations, if such they may be called, must conform to this general pattern of behaviour. (3) There is little inequality of wealth and no class privilege. A man does not acquire more objects than he can use. 571 565 Were he to do so he could only dispose of them by giving them away. [778] It is true that cattle can be amassed, but, except for a few sacred herds kept by prophets, in fact they are not. As has been explained, periodic rinderpest levels the herds and, apart from this, when a herd has reached a certain size the owner—if one may speak of an owner of a herd in which many people have rights of one kind and another—is morally bound to dispose of a portion of it by either himself marrying or by assisting a relative to do so. Cattle are sometimes loaned to persons and the owner is entitled to receive back better beasts than those he lent, e.g. a heifer for the loan of an ox; but people only lend cattle to those with whom they have an established social relationship. (4) In a narrow sense 571 the simple family might be called the economic unit, but we have 476 seen that it is not self-sufficient and the active participation of a wider group is often necessary, e.g. in building, fishing, and hunting. It is also clear that a single family cannot herd its cattle in distant pastures and, at the same time, herd the calves elsewhere, attend to the tiny calves in the kraal, milk, churn, clean the kraal, prepare dung for fuel, cook the food, and so on, by itself. Co-operation is found among neighbours who are also kinsmen. There is also much mutual assistance when co-operation is not essential to the performance of a task, e.g. in weeding and harvesting, for it is conventional to ask people for help, the obligation to assist being part of a general kinship relationship. (5) It must be recognized also that fishing, hunting, herding, and the other activities I have described are always, in a sense, collective actions, for even when there is no active co-operation the whole community passively participates in them. A single man may drive a herd to pasture, a single boy may fish in river shallows, and a single woman may cook, but they can only do these things because they belong to a community and because their actions are related in a productive system. Tradition dictates ends and means and the organization and potential strength of the community gives the co-ordination and security necessary for accomplishment. It has been remarked that seen from the outside a whole village community may be said to be consuming a common stock of food.

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From the same angle the whole community may be said to create it.

I may sum up by repeating that economic relations among the Nuer are part of general social relationships and that these relationships, being mainly of a domestic or kinship order, lie outside the scope of this book. I must emphasize, however, that the members of various segments of a village have close economic relations and that all the people of a village have common economic interests, forming a corporation which owns its particular gardens, water-supplies, fishing-pools, and grazing grounds; which herds its cattle in a compact camp in the drought; and operates jointly in defence, in herding, and in other activities; and in which, especially in the smaller villages, there is much co-operation in labour and sharing of food. All this must be taken for granted in future references to villages. It must be further emphasized that climatic conditions together with a pastoral mode of life necessitate relations beyond the limits of a village and give to wider political groups an economic purpose. This statement will later be examined more closely.

XII

I wish to emphasize the following general points in summary of those conclusions reached in the first two chapters which have special relevance to a study of the political institutions of the Nuer.

1. Oecological relations appear to be in a state of equilibrium. As long as present relations exist cattle husbandry, horticulture, and fishing can be pursued but cannot be improved. Man holds his own in the struggle but does not advance.

2. The necessity of a mixed economy follows from the oecological equilibrium. Rinderpest prevents complete dependence upon milk foods; climate prevents complete dependence on grain; and hydrological variations prevent complete dependence on fish. These three elements together enable Nuer to live, and their seasonal distribution determines Nuer modes of life at different periods of the year.

3. The oecology gives to this mixed economy a bias in favour of cattle husbandry, and this bias must have been far stronger

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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preliminary, classification of Nuer territorial groups of a political kind. We have classified Nuer socio-temporal categories. We now classify their socio-spatial categories.

Were a man to fly over Nuerland he would see, as on Plate XVI, taken by the Royal Air Force in the dry season, white patches with what look like tiny fungoid growths on them. These are village sites with huts and byres. He would see that between such patches are stretches of brown and black, the brown being open grassland and the black being depressions which are swampy in the rains; and that the white patches are wider and more frequent in some parts than in others. We find Nuer give to these distributions certain values which compose their political structure.

It would be possible to measure the exact distance between hut and hut, village and village, tribal area and tribal area, and so forth, and the space covered by each. This would give us a statement of spatial measurements in bare physical terms. By itself it would have very limited significance. Oecological space is more than mere physical distance, though it is affected by it, for it is reckoned also by the character of the country intervening between local groups and its relation to the biological requirements of their members. A broad river divides two Nuer tribes more sharply than many miles of unoccupied bush. A distance which appears small in the dry season has a different appearance when the area it covers is flooded in the rains. A village community which has permanent water near at hand is in a very different position to one which has to travel in the dry season to obtain water, pasturage, and fishing. A tsetse belt creates an impassable barrier, giving wide oecological distance between the peoples it separates (p. 133), and presence or absence of cattle among neighbours of the Nuer likewise determines the oecological distance between them and the Nuer (pp. 132–3). Oecological distance, in this sense, is a relation between communities defined in terms of density and distribution, and with reference to water, vegetation, animal and insect life, and so on.

Structural distance is of a very different order, though it is always influenced and, in its political dimension, to a large extent determined by oecological conditions. By structural

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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571 distance is meant, as we have already indicated in the preceding section, the distance between groups of persons in a social system, expressed in terms of values. The nature of the country determines the distribution of villages and, therefore, the distance between them, but values limit and define the distribution in structural terms and give a different set of distances. A Nuer village may be equidistant from two other villages, but if one of these belongs to a different tribe and the other to the same tribe it may be said to be structurally more distant from the first than from the second. A Nuer tribe which is separated by forty miles from another Nuer tribe is structurally nearer to it than to a Dinka tribe from which it is separated by only twenty miles. When we leave territorial values and speak of lineages and age-sets, structural space is less determined by environmental conditions. One lineage is closer to another than to a third. One age-set is closer to another than to a third. The values attached to residence, kinship, lineage, sex, and age, differentiate groups of persons by segmentation, and the relative positions of the segments to one another gives a perspective that enables us to speak of the divisions between them as divisions of structural space. Having defined what is meant by structural space we may now proceed with a description of its political divisions.

IV

161 We cannot, owing to lack of adequate population statistics (see p. 117) and survey records, present a map showing the density of the different tribes, but a rough estimate is possible for the whole of Nuerland. Jackson says that the area to the east of the Nile amounts to some 26,000 square miles,[1] and recent censuses put its population at about 144,000, making about 5·5 to the square mile. The area to the west of the Nile is no less sparsely inhabited and possibly has a lower density. The total area of Nuerland is probably about 30,000 square miles and the total population round about 200,000. We may estimate that tribal density probably varies from about 4 to 10 to the square mile and that the average distribution for the whole of Nuerland is from about 5 to 6 to the square mile. Given the hydrological conditions of Nuerland and the present economy

[1] Jackson, op. cit., p. 62.

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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often co-ordination of sets between adjacent tribes. A single clan is sometimes dominant in more than one tribal area, dominant clans are linked in a general clan system, and the principal clans are found in every part of Nuerland. We have noted how in the days of ivory trading Gaajak tribesmen journeyed through the territories of other tribes as far as the Zeraf.

The limits of the tribe are therefore not the limits of social intercourse, and there are many ties between persons of one tribe and persons of another tribe. Through association with the clan system and by proximity the people of one tribe may consider themselves nearer to a second than to a third. Thus the three Eastern Jikany tribes feel a vague unity in relation to the Lou, and so do the Bor and Rengyan in relation to the Leek. But, also, individuals, and through individuals kinship groups and even a village, have a circuit of social relationships that cut across tribal divisions, so that a traveller who crosses the border of his tribe can always establish some links with individuals of the tribe he visits in virtue of which he will receive hospitality and protection. If he is wronged, his host, and not he, is involved in legal action. However, there is a kind of international law, in the recognition of conventions in certain matters, beyond political boundaries and the limits of formal law. Thus, though it is considered more risky to marry outside the tribe than within it, since divorce may prove more detrimental in that the return of bride-wealth is less certain, the rules of marriage are acknowledged on both sides and it would be considered improper to take advantage of political cleavage to break them. Tribes are thus politically exclusive groups, but they are not coterminous with an individual's sphere of social relations, though this sphere tends to follow the lines of political cleavage, in the same way as a man's district tends to be equated to his tribal segment. The relation between political structure and general social relations is discussed in the chapters that follow. Here we may note that it is desirable to distinguish between (1) political distance in the sense of structural distance between segments of a tribe, the largest political unit, and between tribes in a system of political relations; (2) general structural distance in the sense of non-political distance between various social groups in the Nuer-speaking community—non-political struc-

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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tural relations are strongest between adjacent tribes, but a common social structure embraces the whole of Nuerland; and (3) the social sphere of an individual, being his circuit of social contacts of one kind or another with other Nuer.

VIII

The political structure of the Nuer can only be understood in relation to their neighbours, with whom they form a single political system. Contiguous Dinka and Nuer tribes are segments within a common structure as much as are segments of the same Nuer tribe. Their social relationship is one of hostility and its expression is in warfare.

The Dinka people are the immemorial enemies of the Nuer. They are alike in their oecologies, cultures, and social systems, so that individuals belonging to the one people are easily assimilated to the other; and when the balanced opposition between a Nuer political segment and a Dinka political segment changes into a relationship in which the Nuer segment becomes entirely dominant, fusion and not a class structure results.

As far as history and tradition go back, and in the vistas of myth beyond their farthest reach, there has been enmity between the two peoples. Almost always the Nuer have been the aggressors, and raiding of the Dinka is conceived by them to be a normal state of affairs and a duty, for they have a myth, like that of Esau and Jacob, which explains it and justifies it. Nuer and Dinka are represented in this myth as two sons of God who promised his old cow to Dinka and its young calf to Nuer Dinka came by night to God's byre and, imitating the voice of Nuer, obtained the calf. When God found that he had been tricked he was angry and charged Nuer to avenge the injury by raiding Dinka's cattle to the end of time. This story, familiar to every Nuer, is not only a reflection of the political relations between the two peoples but is also a commentary on their characters. Nuer raid for cattle and seize them openly and by force of arms. Dinka steal them or take them by treachery. All Nuer regard them—and rightly so—as thieves, and even the Dinka seem to admit the reproach, if we attribute correct significance to the statement made to Mr. K. C. P. Struvé in 1907 by the Dinka keeper of the shrine of Deng dit at Luang Deng.

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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does not see himself as a member of that same group in so far as he is a member of a segment of it which stands outside of and is opposed to other segments of it. Hence a man can be a member of a group and yet not a member of it. This is a fundamental principle of Nuer political structure. Thus a man is a member of his tribe in its relation to other tribes, but he is not a member of his tribe in the relation of his segment of it to other segments of the same kind. Likewise a man is a member of his tribal segment in its relation to other segments, but he is not a member of it in the relation of his village to other villages of the same segment. A characteristic of any political group is hence its invariable tendency towards fission and the opposition of its segments, and another characteristic is its tendency towards fusion with other groups of its own order in opposition to political segments larger than itself. Political values are thus always, structurally speaking, in conflict. One value attaches a man to his group and another to a segment of it in opposition to other segments of it, and the value which controls his action is a function of the social situation in which he finds himself. For a man sees himself as a member of a group only in opposition to other groups and he sees a member of another group as a member of a social unity however much it may be split into opposed segments.

Therefore the diagram presented on p. 114 illustrates political structure in a very crude and formal way. It cannot very easily be pictured diagrammatically, for political relations are relative and dynamic. They are best stated as tendencies to conform to certain values in certain situations, and the value is determined by the structural relationships of the persons who compose the situation. Thus whether and on which side a man fights in a dispute depends on the structural relationship of the persons engaged in it and of his own relationship to each party.

We need to refer to another important principle of Nuer political structure: the smaller the local group the stronger the sentiment uniting its members. Tribal sentiment is weaker than the sentiment of one of its segments and the sentiment of a segment is weaker than the sentiment of a village which is part of it. Logically this might be supposed to be the case, for if unity

[See category 11b — Analyst]

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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within a group is a function of its opposition to groups of the same kind it might be surmised that the sentiment of unity within a group must be stronger than the sentiment of unity within a larger group that contains it. But it is also evident that the smaller the group the more the contacts between its members, the more varied are these contacts, and the more they are co-operative. In a big group like the tribe contacts between its members are infrequent and corporate action is limited to occasional military excursions. In a small group like the village not only are there daily residential contacts, often of a co-operative nature, but the members are united by close agnatic, cognatic, and affinal ties which can be expressed in reciprocal action. These become fewer and more distant the wider the group, and the cohesion of a political group is undoubtedly dependent on the number and strength of ties of a non-political kind.

It must also be stated that political actualities are confused and conflicting. They are confused because they are not always, even in a political context, in accord with political values, though they tend to conform to them, and because social ties of a different kind operate in the same field, sometimes strengthening them and sometimes running counter to them. They are conflicting because the values that determine them are, owing to the relativity of political structure, themselves in conflict. Consistency of political actualities can only be seen when the dynamism and relativity of political structure are understood and the relation of political structure to other social systems is taken into consideration.

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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bably always been the same number of sets in existence at any time and these sets always have the same relative positions to each other in the system, regardless of actual groups of men composing them.

It is significant that among the Nuer, as among other East African peoples, the age-set system is the first institution to undergo rapid and great modification under European rule and that the other social systems do not appear to be affected by the changes in its constitution. This tends to confirm the opinion we have earlier expressed, that whilst the age-set system is combined with the territorial and lineage systems in the same social cadre and is consistent with them, the consistency is not an interdependence.

IV

Within the age-set system the position of every male Nuer is structurally defined in relation to every other male Nuer and his status to them is one of seniority, equality, or juniority. It is difficult to describe these statuses in terms of behaviour, because the attitudes they impose are often of a very general nature. The following points may, however, be noted. (1) There are certain ritual observances and avoidances, chiefly between members of the same set, but also between sets. The most important of these are the segregation of the sets at sacrificial feasts, to which we have referred, and the stringent prohibition on members of a set burying an age-mate or partaking of the meat of beasts sacrificed at his mortuary ceremony; but there are a number of other ritual injunctions. (2) A man may not marry, or have sexual relations with, the daughter of an age-mate, for she is his 'daughter' and he is her 'father'. Also, while a man may always have sexual relations with the daughter of one of his father's age-mates he ought not to marry her unless either his father, or her father, is dead, and then only after the parties to the marriage have exchanged beasts in atonement to the age-set of the fathers. (3) Members of the same age-set are on terms of entire equality. A man does not stand on ceremony with his age-mates, but jokes, plays, and eats with them at his ease. Age-mates associate in work, war, and in all the pursuits of leisure. They are expected to offer one

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
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561 another hospitality and to share their possessions. Fighting is
●571 considered an appropriate mode of behaviour between age-mates, but a man ought not to fight a man of a senior set. The comradeship between age-mates springs from a recognition of a mystical union between them, linking their fortunes, which derives from an almost physical bond, analogous to that of true kinship, for they have shed their blood together. (4) Members
561 of a set are expected to show respect to members of senior sets,
576 and their deference to them can be seen in discussions, in
626 etiquette, in division of food, and so forth. Whenever there is a question about the propriety of speech or action it is judged by reference to the relative positions of the persons concerned in the age-set structure, if kinship status is not also involved. Since every man has a known age-relationship to every other man in Nuerland with whom he is likely to come into contact, their social attitude to him, and his social attitude to them, is determined in advance by the distances between them in age-set structure, unless kinship takes precedence. Although it is possible for a man to avenge a breach of these patterns of behaviour by a curse, if it is a very serious breach, the ordinary sanctions of conduct are a man's conscience and desire for approval.

561 It will have been noted that the relations between the sets
608 are defined in the idiom of family relationships. The members of a man's father's age-set are his 'fathers' and the members of his father's brothers' 'age-sets' are, in a less precise sense, also his 'fathers'. The sons of a man's set are his 'sons', and they may fall into several sets. The wives of members of a man's father's set are his 'mothers', and the wives of members of his sons' sets are his 'daughters'. All members of a man's own set are likewise 'brothers', though here the analogy is seldom expressed because the comradeship between age-mates is strongly affirmed in the idiom of the system, for they are all *ric*, age-mates, to one another. As, in any case, a man commonly addresses all persons much senior to himself as 'father' and 'mother', all persons much junior to himself as 'son' and 'daughter', and all persons of about the same age as himself as 'brother' and 'sister', the terminology of address between different sets is not a differentiating one and it cannot be said how

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
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by Arab merchants, is usually available and bought with cash. Cases of this kind sometimes appear before the courts. The facts are not usually denied by the defendant, but execution is often resisted.

Gifts Given in Friendship (*math*)

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Another situation in which cattle are involved, and which is a frequent cause of litigation, is the institution of the 'Best Friend', known in Nuer as *math*. Two men will often form a bond of friendship by exchanging cattle either as a one-sided loan or as a direct exchange, each party taking the other's cow. This can scarcely be described as trade, but is often the cause of dispute since friends fall out.

Nger Ngwen v. *Can Nyoi* (*Jikany Nuer Case*).

Nger and Can were 'best friends' (*math*). Nger gave Can a black cow as a gift. Can gave Nger a cow when Nger got married. Nger then asked Can to give him a cow in milk in order to feed his children. Can obliged by giving him a cow which he had received on the marriage of his daughter. Nger, however, considered that the cow was a bad one and, after a violent quarrel with Can, demanded that their 'friendship' should be broken (*dak math*) publicly and that Can should give back his black cow. The matter was taken to court, but Nger's claim was thrown out as groundless since Can had already given him two cows in exchange.

Exchanges of this sort are a corollary to this form of institutionalized friendship. Disputes of the kind mentioned above are simple enough, though often heated. It is perhaps surprising that they should appear before the courts at all, because the issues must be clear to everyone and there is rarely any doubt.

5. THE INFRINGEMENT OF RIGHTS IN PROPERTY

Self-help

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If the seizure of cattle, the property of another man, is defined as 'theft', then theft of cattle is a common offence among the Nuer. Nuer, however, distinguish clearly between what is considered licensed seizure, either openly or by stealth, and theft for which the thief can produce no customary justification. The word *kwal*, which is used loosely to describe both forms of misappropriation, is employed regularly, but in its more specific meaning it refers to this seizure of what is considered a man's right. Used in connexion with cattle the word implies that the culprit, however mistaken he may be, believes that through kinship ties or in settlement of a debt he has a legal claim to the cattle. Again, a man may seize for himself cattle which he regards as his just due in compensation for some injury done to him by their owner. Thus, for example, a man may seize six head of cattle

ashes from it are smeared over the body. Cattle urine is used in churning and cheese-making and also for washing. Evans-Pritchard rightly calls the Nuer 'parasites of the cow'.(1) 237

The social importance of cattle among the Nuer

The fact that cattle have more than an economic value may be amply illustrated from the part they play in social life. 231

Relationships with neighbouring tribal groups are partly dependent on the value attached to cattle. The Nuer are contemptuous of those who have no cattle, while they raid those who have in order that they may augment their own herds. A man will defend his cattle to the last and will die for the sake of the herds. Disputes within the Nuer tribe are often about cattle and about the ownership of pastures and water supplies necessary for their well-being. Cattle are paid in compensation for homicide and injury. It is the needs of the cattle which compel the yearly dry-season migration to fresh pastures. [721] [691]

Cattle form the bridewealth of the Nuer, that is, the successive transfers of cattle from the bridegroom's family to that of the bride marking the fact of marriage. Cattle are farmed out among friends as a precaution against the total destruction of a herd by disease; thus they tend to consolidate friendships and to maintain the network of relationships between people within a village and between the inhabitants of separate villages. [593] [572]

Family relationships are expressed in terms of cattle, as are the rules of incest and the status of an individual. Men take 'ox-names' - names which refer to the colour or other peculiarities of their favourite animals. In ritual cattle play an important part; they are sacrificed to the spirits and, when he desires to establish contact with ghosts and spirits, a man rubs ashes along the back of an animal, invoking the ancestral spirits as he does so. Cows are dedicated to the totemic spirits and the sky spirits. Daily life revolves round the needs of cattle; Nuer think cattle and talk cattle. Oxen are valued for display and prestige, and the merits of their favourite beasts are boasted of by their owners. Nuer language is rich in terms describing the various attributes of cattle. Tassels, decorations and carved tethering pegs are made by the owners, while the favourites in the herd will be played with, sung to and have poems made up about them. Young men will get boys to lead their favourite ox round the village for all to admire and will themselves leap behind it. Among the Nuer there is scarcely any aspect of life into which cattle do not enter and play an important part. Evans-Pritchard writes that the Nuer define all social processes and relationships in terms of cattle and that their social idiom is a bovine idiom. [551] [782] [192]

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(1) Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940, p.35.